DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 416 970 PS 026 214

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TITLE Early Childhood Development and Social Integration: The Mediterranean Experience. A Background Paper.
INSTITUTION International Child Development Initiatives, Leiden (Netherlands).
PUB DATE 1997-12-00
NOTE 37p.; Paper presented at the Health and Social Welfare Conference (Scheveningen, Netherlands, December 9-11, 1997).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS At Risk Persons; *Child Development; Child Rearing; *Day Care; Day Care Centers; *Early Childhood Education; Foreign Countries; Program Design; Program Development; Social Indicators; *Social Integration
IDENTIFIERS *Early Childhood Development Programs; *Mediterranean Region

ABSTRACT

This paper explores early childhood education (ECD) and social integration within a common framework and against the backdrop of experience gained in these fields in the following 12 Mediterranean nations: Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, Palestine, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, and Turkey. The paper notes that these countries display a diversity in their levels of social, economic and political development and vary with respect to child development indicators, provisions and programs for early childhood development and policies for integrating children and families at risk. The following areas of mutual concern which pertain to the region as a whole are identified: (1) there is a need to demystify the whole issues of the care and education of young children and empower parents in their role as the prime educators of their children; (2) it is important to develop cost effective programs which will reach the largest number of children and families at risk; (3) there is a growing body of evidence that pleads for strengthening activities in ECD that are already in place but this should be done with due regard to local needs and constraints; (4) vertical and horizontal networking, improved documentation and giving recognition to local assets and strengths should be given due importance in program development. (Author/SD)

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ED 416 970

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION
The Mediterranean Experience

a background paper

for the conference

HEALTH AND SOCIAL WELFARE
9-11 December 1997
Scheveningen, The Netherlands

prepared by

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper looks at early childhood education (ECD) and social integration within a common framework and against the backdrop of experience gained in these fields in the following twelve Mediterranean nations: Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, Palestine, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Turkey. Many of the region's children and their families could be described as socially excluded as they do not have access to basic services and entitlements. The discussion on ECD and social integration should lead to a rethinking of wider development issues. There is a need to address the collection of reliable quantitative and qualitative data as a pre-requisite for policy development and implementation, to accept cultural diversity as a positive given, to validate local knowledge, and to build up capacity to network with various groups and individuals.

The early months and years of life are crucial for the future of the individual and the quality of care and interaction given during this period will have a profound impact on the growth and development of the child and for the society in which the child is born. Fifty percent of a person's intellectual capacity is developed by the age of four. ECD can be described from two perspectives. The first looks at child development as a process in which the child grows from an immature, dependent being to an autonomous adult. The second perspective looks at ECD as a policy and intervention tool and as such is concerned with interlinked activities seeking to benefit children, for example parent education, community development, child advocacy, children's rights, maternal health, and even income generating activities.

It is widely accepted that investing in children yields high rates of return - in social as well as in economic terms. Children with ECD show:

- better readiness for schooling
- improved school attendance and performance
- reduced teenage pregnancy
- reduced need for curative medical attention
- more social responsibility as adolescents
- fewer accidents

In addition, as adults such children will be more likely to be employed, enjoy higher incomes, divorce less, have smaller families and display less criminal behaviour.

The term social exclusion and with it the associated labels of inclusion, integration and cohesion have become common parlance among policy makers world-wide. They present the image of compassion and solidarity and generate the impression of a collective moral responsibility for social integration. Social integration has thus become a catch phrase for showing that governments really care. All citizens should have the wherewithal

to get optimal access to the main services and benefits that society has to offer and be able to participate in the processes and activities that are deemed as relevant by society at large. In developing countries, *community development* and *educación popular* are tried and tested outside interventions to break the circle of social exclusion that can hold generations in its grip. The importance of *educación popular* is that socially excluded groups make the effort to connect with mainstream society while policies aiming at social inclusion usually works in the other direction.

ECD can be a powerful tool for social integration as it can bring people together around the issue of children. It is a good training ground for the parents and professionals who participate in ECD programmes as they gain experience and confidence in relating better to their communities and society as a whole. In addition, it is not just the children but also their parents, communities and society as a whole that stands to benefit directly from ECD programmes. But there are also some potential risks. If the ECD provision is not universal and of equal effectiveness, it can become an elitist tool.

The twelve countries included in this paper display a diversity in their levels of social, economic and political development. They also vary with respect to child development indicators, provisions and programmes for early childhood development and policies for integrating children and families at risk. However, they also share some features in common deriving from their geographical proximity, levels of economic development and shared culture. All twelve countries also have a rich wealth of information in traditional child-rearing practices, as well as experience in developing local responses to ECD needs. There is thus sufficient know-how to allow for experience to be shared within the region and lessons to be learnt.

The following areas of mutual concern which pertain to the region as a whole have been identified. First, there is a need to demystify the whole issue of the care and education of young children and empower parents in their role as the prime educators of their children. Second, it is important to develop cost effective programmes which will reach the largest number of children and families at risk. Third, there is a growing body of evidence that pleads for strengthening activities in ECD that are already in place but this should be done with due regard to local needs and constraints. Finally, vertical and horizontal networking, improved documentation and giving recognition to local assets and strengths should be given due importance in developing ECD programmes.

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION
The Mediterranean Experience

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper looks at two major social themes - early childhood education (ECD) and social exclusion - within a common framework[1]. Both issues are currently gaining ground, in the Mediterranean region and elsewhere, as major planks of policy and programme development. Originating in Western Europe, the concept of social exclusion has been used to study the social consequences of poverty and unemployment. But more recently there have been attempts to extend this concept to analyze other aspects of social development and to shed it of its Eurocentric origins. With all nations exposed to profound and rapid changes, families have to find new ways to remain integrated within their communities and societies and to prepare their children for their future role as participating citizens.

The two issues of ECD and social integration are discussed against the backdrop of the Mediterranean region, in particular the following twelve countries: Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, Palestine, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Turkey. Many of the region's children and their families could be described as socially excluded as they do not have access to basic needs and to the services and entitlements that are their due as citizens. For children, this could mean being deprived of adequate care and development opportunities during the early years. This could, in turn, have consequences for their ability to function effectively as adults. The thesis being forwarded in this paper is that ECD could be used as an effective mechanism for promoting social integration and cohesion.

The discussion on ECD and social integration should, inevitably, lead to a rethinking of wider development issues. For example, it will address the collection of reliable quantitative and qualitative data as a pre-requisite for policy development as well as for monitoring and awareness raising purposes. It will also require the acceptance of cultural diversity as a positive

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[1] The issue of social inclusion/exclusion can be approached from many angles such as effects of long-term unemployment, position of ethnic minorities, integration of the handicapped or the role of the elderly in society. In this paper the focus is solely on early childhood education.

given. Similarly, validation of the knowledge and experience of socially excluded groups and the ability to network and establish partnerships between unequal groups and individuals will also have to be attended to. This paper discusses these and other pertinent issues with respect to the Mediterranean region and provides pointers for further dialogue.

The information presented here has been culled from a variety of sources such as reports from United Nations agencies and other international development organizations and local NGOs. The literature on child development issues pertaining to these countries has also been consulted. In addition, discussions have been held with professionals working in the region.

2. RECOGNIZING THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

What is early childhood development?

The early months and years of life are crucial for the future of the individual. The quality of care and interaction provided during this period will have an impact on the growth and development of the child. It will also have consequences for the society into which the child is born. Fifty percent of a person's intellectual potential is developed by the age of four. It is obvious that appropriate care and education during this period will have a lasting effect on their intellectual capacity, personality and social behaviour as adults.

However, this important period of a child's life can also be a source of peril. Survival is still a problem in some parts of the world, and many infants who survive the first years of life continue to be at risk of delayed and debilitated development. Long-term exposure to risk factors such as poverty, inadequate child care, illness, poor nutrition, family stress and unstimulating environments can damage the growth and development of children, affect their sense of wellbeing and compromise their future.

Early childhood development encompasses the three interlinked concepts of survival, growth and development. The term survival is self-explanatory; growth refers to changes in size and development to changes in complexity and function. Child development is, therefore, a **process** in which the child moves from simple to complex patterns of behaviour - in short, grows from an immature, dependent child to an autonomous adult. Child development can be divided into four dimensions: the physical; the cognitive; the social and the emotional. These dimensions are not independent but interact with one another in complex ways. The healthy and normal development of children would require attention to be paid to all these aspects.

Rationale for investing in early childhood development

It is now widely accepted that investing in the development of children yields high rates of return - in social as well as in economic terms. Research and experience from various parts of the world demonstrate that children who have enjoyed early care and education show:

- better readiness for schooling;
- improved school attendance and performance;
- reduced delinquency during teenage years;
- reduced teenage pregnancy;
- reduced need for curative medical attention;
- more social responsibility as adolescents;
- fewer accidents.

There is also a high probability that as adults, such children will be more likely to be employed, will enjoy higher incomes, divorce less, have smaller families and display less criminal behaviour.

Although the search for long-term effects of early childhood education is legitimate, it carries with it the inherent danger of looking at children only as future adults, and not as deserving of attention in their own right. Investing in children should not become a predominantly economic concern aimed at turning out productive adults who pay taxes and do not become a burden on their societies. Children have a human right to receive care and to develop to their full potential. This right is best embodied in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which sets out the principles regarding children's basic needs as well as the roles and responsibilities of parents, communities and of the state towards children. Briefly, it encourages signatories to:

> "... ensure to the maximum extent possible child survival and development."
>
> (Article 6)

> "... render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall insure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children."
>
> (Article 18.2)

Perhaps the most important contribution of the CRC is that it recognizes children as intrinsically important, regardless of their future status, or the future outcomes of intervention programmes. Children have the right to receive care, even when it cannot be 'proved' that this care will be translated in terms of positive outcomes later on in their lives.

Early childhood development programmes

All societies have their own specific mechanisms for educating and taking care of young children and these can vary significantly across cultures. Raising children can be the prime responsibility of the parents or can be shared by the extended family. It can also take place in settings outside the home such as in creches, preschools and kindergartens which could be organized by the community, be part of State provision, or run on more commercial lines. **Child care** and **child education** are inextricably linked activities. Good child care inevitably involves attention to physical needs combined with socialization. It also poses developmental tasks and offers cognitive stimulation.

The term **early childhood development programme** is used here to describe the whole range of activities that promote the care, socialization and education of children - be they in the home,

in the community or in centres. Therefore, programmes for preschool education should not focus narrowly on high-cost, institutional activities but encompass a broader approach which is more inclusive and reaches a wider audience. They should be participatory and responsive to local needs. They should be community based and should build on local strengths and local child rearing patterns. Such programmes will succeed only if they are cost effective and financially feasible. And finally, they should be capable of reaching the largest number of children at risk and those who would otherwise be excluded from such activities.

Early child development as an area of intervention

ECD has increasingly gained an additional connotation, if not a completely separate interpretation, in the world of policy makers, development organizations and donors. For them ECD is a policy tool, a building block in a nation's overall development, and an area for intervention and programme development. In this context ECD becomes more loosely defined and tends to incorporate a range of interlinked activities and processes seeking to benefit children. Components and activities relating to parent education, mothers' groups, community development, child advocacy, children's rights, maternal health, and even income generating activities and capacity building become part and parcel of ECD.

UNICEF, for example, reflects this wider interpretation in its typology of seven programme approaches, each of which is directed towards different groups of participants. These include:

Educating caregivers: aimed at educating and empowering parents, family and other caregivers.

Promoting community development: promoting community awareness and encouraging community participation and initiatives in a range of activities related to early childhood development.

Delivering a service: enhancing child development by catering to the needs of children in centres outside the home.

Strengthening national resources and capacities: strengthening the human, financial and material resources of institutions responsible for implementing programmes.

Strengthening demand and awareness: this focuses on the production and distribution of knowledge among the public in order to increase awareness, create a demand for services, and build political will among policy makers.

Developing national child care and family policies: encouraging policies which are sensitive to the needs of families and women with respect to their child care and child rearing responsibilities.

Developing supportive legal and regulatory frameworks: increasing awareness of rights and legal resources such as maternal leave and benefits, supporting breastfeeding for working mothers.

These different approaches are also relevant at the national level. They are necessary **means** as they create the right conditions for sustainable child development. But they should not be allowed to become ends in themselves at the expense of the child. Thus a capacity building or community development project, originally intended to promote ECD may result in a stronger management structure in an NGO or a well functioning rice bank or cooperative. But it may not necessarily result in healthier and well developed children. To prevent this from happening the situation and the needs of children should be kept in focus all the time and during all key phases of a project.

3. SOCIAL INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION

What is social exclusion?

The term 'social exclusion' is now widely used to describe a variety of groups ranging from ethnic minorities, immigrants, single-parent families, street children, the elderly and unemployed to former prisoners. It was first coined in France in the mid Seventies to refer to individuals who were labelled as social problems or social misfits i.e. mentally and physically handicapped people, delinquents, drug addicts. In its current usage, social exclusion has lost this earlier stigmatizing and narrow perspective. It is now used to depict the social disadvantages that are caused by the major economic and social transformations that are taking place in society.

In Western Europe this concept has gained a lot of currency after it was adopted as a major policy plank by the European Commission. The Commission defines social exclusion "...in relation to the social rights of citizens...to a certain basic standard of living and to participation in the major social and occupational opportunities of the society". But does this concept have relevance and value beyond Western Europe? More recently, attempts have been made to test these ideas in other contexts, particularly in developing countries and to explore if there are any policy and analytical advantages to using the concepts of exclusion and integration.

Advantages of this approach

Are the concepts of exclusion and integration a new bandwagon or do they add to conventional frameworks for describing poverty and alienation? It would appear that there are several advantages to using this approach, including in the Mediterranean region.

First, social exclusion is not merely a new label for describing poverty and disadvantage. Rather, it embraces these concepts and analyses them in their various dimensions - economic, political, social and cultural. Thus, while the various dimensions of exclusion will interact and overlap, they are not necessarily congruent. For example, migrant families may be excluded from child care services not on account of poverty but because they lack information and the means to access them.

Second, it goes beyond the concept of social exclusion by focusing on the **processes** by which individuals and groups fail to have access to the benefits offered by the economy and the society. It analyses how and why some are systematically marginalized while others are integrated.

Third, it focuses not just on processes but also on **social actors and agents** who include and exclude. These actors can be social groups, enterprises, religious bodies, local elites and also the

State. For example, the policies of the State could actively include or exclude mothers from the employment market.

Finally, a major advantage of the concept of exclusion is that it permits the consideration of welfare and rights within a single framework. It goes beyond the economic and social aspects of poverty and includes political aspects such as rights and citizenship and raises the issue of social justice. In this approach, the attainment of basic human rights can become a precondition for overcoming economic exclusion. For example, the right of children to certain basic needs might well be a precondition for overcoming exclusion in other spheres.

Caring societies

The term social exclusion, and with it the associated labels of inclusion, integration and cohesion, has become common parlance among policy makers world-wide. It presents the image of compassion and solidarity and generates the impression of a collective moral responsibility for social integration. The term reflects the sentiment that all citizens should function well in one society. People should not feel left out or isolated; the romantic notion of living in a village where everybody is known and connected to everybody and everything is seen as exemplary. All citizens should have the wherewithal to get optimal access to the main services and benefits that society has to offer and be able to participate in the processes and activities that are deemed as relevant by the society at large. Policies should create a caring society, a society that successfully copes with the fragmenting and alienating forces and that keeps all its people together in a reasonable state of social wellbeing, in other words a society for all. Social integration, in this very wide sense, has become a catch phrase for showing that governments really care.

Community development and *educación popular*

At the psychological level, the state of social exclusion or integration is highly subjective. People may be socially excluded or function at the margins of society without being aware of it, minding it, and may even wilfully opt for it. The same may apply to groups. When their internal networks are strong, their social exclusion may not necessarily harm them or cause them dissatisfaction. Some religious sects may function in this way, for example. However, the situation is very different for the majority of people who find themselves at the periphery of society, or are not part of it at all. There are many people who lack social ties to the family, local community, voluntary organizations, a work environment and even the nation.

This applies, in particular, to many families with young children who live in poverty and especially to single parent families. The common picture of these families is of a mother who is either on welfare or underemployed. She has few relatives, friends or

acquaintances she could consult or be comforted by. She mistrusts the outside world and stays away from statutory agencies and their professionals including kindergartens and teachers. Her physical condition is poor and she in a light depression. She cares about her children but is not in a position to optimally mediate between them and society and provide them with optimal education. In turn, her children may not develop well, may underperform and lose out on what society has to offer. They are locked in a vicious circle from which it is hard to escape without outside intervention.

In developing countries, **community development** is the tried and tested outside intervention to break this circle. Poor and otherwise socially excluded persons and families are assisted in building up a group spirit and in working together to define and attain common goals. There is a strong emphasis on self-reliance and on building on available assets. These newly-formed groups can often become active outside the formal system or even in the face of it. Although their lives may improve and their psychological sense of being excluded may decrease, as groups they remain largely socially excluded. ***Educación popular***, pioneered in Latin America and rooted in the ideas of Paolo Freire, takes this intervention one step further and actually *empowers* marginalized people to make bridges with the formal system and to challenge it, at times even forcefully. The importance of *educación popular* is that socially excluded groups make the effort to connect with mainstream society; policies aiming at social inclusion usually work in the other direction.

4. EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION

The discussion of ECD in the context of social inclusion and exclusion should not come as a surprise. A prime reason is that children show up in demographic statistics as the most vulnerable segment of the population, and also as the quickest to be discarded or excluded. They form the majority of the poor, the sick, and the handicapped. Increasingly, their numbers prevail on the lists of victims of violence, war, discrimination, commercial exploitation, abuse of power, injustice, and of environmental degradation. As they are too young and too unequipped to fight for themselves and as their parents are often too powerless and disenfranchised, governments have the obligation to step in. Children, therefore, constitute by their very condition, a key target group.

Another good reason for approaching ECD from a social integration perspective is because it lends itself so well to policy intervention. With relatively little effort and cost, children can be rescued from leading a marginalized life and can be guided to become well-participating citizens. In this context the word 'cost' should, perhaps, be replaced by 'investment' as monies spent on ECD programmes return manifold. There is sufficient experience around that can be used by parents and their communities to provide their children with the environment they need to prosper and to do well in school. Most effective intervention programmes boil down to a limited number of rather simple and feasible principles. They are: implementing the Rights of the Child, involving and empowering parents, working in groups, respecting and validating local culture and knowledge, connecting nonformal and formal systems, and embedding local activities in larger, facilitating support structures. The interesting common feature of these principles is that they not only have a direct bearing on children but also carry strong integrative powers.

ECD as a tool for integration

A strong integrative force in ECD is its facility to bring people together. Everywhere in the world people list the care of their young among their top priorities. ECD is a proven *entry point* for community development. People readily rally around children and are prepared to undertake joint action for them. They are willing to build facilities, make toys, supervise play groups and sit in meetings and participate on boards, or otherwise lend their time and resources.

ECD can also be a good training ground. Through their participation in ECD, people can gain experience and confidence in relating better to their communities and society as a whole. In particular, parents and *para-professionals* - who are often parents themselves - can discover their own potential and learn new skills by accepting new tasks and responsibilities. These

skills are: working in groups, planning, organizing activities, running an administration, conducting and participating in meetings, finding access to information, negotiating and bargaining, defining and resolving problems, defending their own interests, relating to professionals and civil servants, building up and maintaining networks, and acquiring and improving communication abilities. In general, people working in ECD see their social and employability skills grow. One of the striking outcomes of ECD is, indeed, the upward social mobility and improved social integration of its workers.

Children, their parents and their communities are the immediate *stakeholders* in ECD and stand to benefit directly from it. For them, ECD is a way out of social exclusion. But what about those segments of society that are firmly integrated? What do they have to gain from ECD programmes directed at children and families other than their own? Two direct advantages spring to mind. The first is that ECD yields high economic returns; instead of having to maintain socially excluded groups, society can now profit from their increased productivity. The second advantage is that communities and nations become more politically stable when their children are being cared for. ECD enriches society at large in other, indirect ways as well. Since ECD programmes are often carried out in situations of rapid transition and uncertainty they are, by force of circumstances, propelled to find solutions for many new problems and challenges. Most of these problems may seem far away or may even be unknown to those who are securely anchored in society. However, many of these problems are already encroaching all layers of society. Some of the most devastating effects of *globalization*, for example, manifested themselves first at the peripheries of society, but are now increasingly present in 'ordinary' households as well. Over the years, ECD has shown to be a breeding ground of innovative and creative work with relevance for almost everybody. Mainstream society has a great deal to learn from what is happening outside its purview.

Some dilemmas

The vast potential of ECD as an integrative, including factor is beyond dispute. But there are also some potential risks. When treated without caution, ECD can turn into a divisive and excluding instrument. If the provision of early child care and education is not universal and of equal effectiveness, children may be set on a track very early in life which may lead them away rather than towards integration. ECD can easily become an elitist device. Top universities, for example, tend to dominate the curriculum of high schools; these, in turn, determine the educational climate in the schools, kindergartens, and preschools, closing out all those who cannot cram into the few slots available. In many aspects, early education facilities carry the stereotypes and biases of the dominant society against girls, specific ethnic, socio-economic, religious or language groups, or the physically and mentally handicapped.

Another dilemma is created by the legitimate wish for 'the best' by socially excluded families. By 'the best' is meant those facilities that are usually commonplace for the dominant groups in society. For example, families in urban ghettos may demand the same 'high-quality' preschools as middle-class children enjoy. Available resources may permit the establishment of just a few such schools, effectively favouring a small group of children over others. The option of low-cost, but equally good, community-based education is often rejected as it is perceived as inferior. The responses to these possible adverse effects have not been fully worked out; the current discussion on social integration may forward this process.

5. THE MEDITERRANEAN EXPERIENCE WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Children have occupied centre stage in the hearts and minds of the peoples who live in the Middle East and North Africa since times immemorial. Parents, in particular, have taken great pride in caring for and educating their children. Recent demographic, socio-cultural and economic changes which are affecting virtually everybody in the region are also impacting on children. They influence the environment in which children grow up and pose challenges on a scale and in degrees that are totally new. During the last two to three decades, the region has seen a vast reflection and reorientation of early childhood care and education. Many impressive and innovative initiatives have been developed and a large fount of highly-valued expertise and experience has become available.

This short paper cannot do justice to all the work that parents, community-based care-givers and professional educators do on behalf of the young child. This would require extensive meetings with these people, observing and participating in their activities and reading and studying the many papers and materials that are available. The following section presents in a nutshell the abstract contours of a fertile, dynamic and highly varied field. Table 1 provides background statistical information on the twelve countries. Tables 2, 3 and 4 contain more specific intelligence on children, particularly on ECD provision.

The data presented in these tables have been compiled from a variety of sources. It is only recently that statistical information on children has become available in some of the countries included in the review. The data are thus not comparable across countries and do not always pertain to the same year. However, the numbers should be treated as indicative of the broad orders of magnitude. The importance of having accurate and reliable statistics cannot be overestimated as it is an indispensable tool for developing, monitoring and supporting policies and intervention programmes.

Background information

As can be seen from Table 1, the discussion in this paper is about roughly thirty million pre-school age children, and their numbers are rapidly growing. They make up approximately one fifth of the total populations of these countries and as such are entitled to a significant stake of the region's development efforts. The table also shows that there is a clear relationship between economic (GNP) and social indicators (life expectancy, percentage of people living below the absolute poverty level). Higher incomes tend to generate better social conditions. However, this relation does not represent a complete causality as some poorer nations appear to perform better than other, more affluent ones. Factors other than income are evidently important. In the main, both income and life expectancy in the region appear

to be improving and this trend is likely to continue for some time.

Table 1.
Background Information on the Twelve Countries

Country	Population under five (millions)	GNP per capita (USD)	% of people living below absolute poverty level	Life expectancy
Algeria	3.6	1,650	20	62
Cyprus	.06	10,100	N.A.	77
Egypt	8.1	720	34	65
Israel	0.6	14,530	N.A.	77
Jordan	2.7	1,440	16	69
Lebanon	0.4	2,150	17	69
Malta	0.03	7,200	N.A.	77
Morocco	3.4	1,140	36	65
Palestine	0.3	1,688 (W.B.) 693 (Gaza)	N.A.	74
Syrian A.R.	2.7	1,160	N.A.	68
Tunisia	1.0	1,790	17	69
Turkey	7.5	2,500	N.A.	68

Source: Tables 1 - 4 have been compiled by using data from UNESCO, UNICEF, The World Bank, and Instituto del Tercer Mundo and other sources.

Early childhood development - indicators and provision

Table 2 offers data on the three crucial components that make up a child's development - health, nutrition and psycho-social development. For health and nutrition, *Under Five Mortality Rate* (U5MR) and *Malnourishment* (weight for age) have been taken as indicators. As similar indicators are not available for psycho-social development, their proxies i.e. *educational enrolment* and

drop out have been used. It should be mentioned, however, that *enrolment* and *drop out* usually say more about the school system than about the children. Indeed, *push out* would be a better way of describing educational wastage.

Table 2
Early Childhood Development Indicators

Countries	U5MR	% of malnourished children	School enrolment		Drop out
			Boys	Girls	
Algeria	61	13	99	89	8
Cyprus	11	8	99	99	N.A.
Egypt	51	9	95	82	2
Israel	9	..	99	99	0
Jordan	25	9	89	89	2
Lebanon	40	8	99	99	N.A.
Malta	17	12	99	99	N.A.
Morocco	75	9	73	53	20
Palestine	36	4.5	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Syrian A.R.	36	12	78	77	N.A.
Tunisia	37	9	94	89	92
Turkey	50	10	99	99	11

Three observations are key to Table 2. The first and most important one is that many young children living in the region have to struggle hard to survive and to develop. The second is that the odds are still stacked against the girl child. In almost all domains of child survival and development they still fall behind. The third is that dramatic progress has been made in all domains. Even compared to data of a few years ago, more children survive, more go to school and stay there, and the gender gap is narrowing. All indications are that this trend will continue.

Table 3 provides information on participation rates of pre-school children in formal institutions. This information is problematic as it may mask the importance of many informal and nonformal provisions. Child care and education within the family (informal education) and those organized by communities, NGOs and parents (nonformal education) often coexist alongside services provided

by the government, para-statal, statutory or commercial organizations (formal education) but these may not be reflected in statistics.

Female literacy rates can also be a useful indicator of child development. Experience from around the world has shown that literate mothers have fewer children who are better spaced and are consequently healthier and better nourished. They are also more likely to go to school and attain higher levels of development. Table 3 shows no meaningful correlation between female literacy and the availability of formal services. It is likely that in situations were female literacy is high and formal attendance is low, extensive nonformal arrangements exist. In all events, female literacy is pivotal to any effort to stimulate early child development.

Table 3
Attendance Rates in Formal ECD Services and Female Literacy Rates

Country	Attendance Rates in formal ECD service	Female Literacy Rates
Algeria	3	49
Cyprus	8	91
Egypt	7	39
Israel	83	89
Jordan	21	79
Lebanon	65	90
Malta	100	86
Morocco	57	31
Palestine	20	76
Syrian A.R.	6	56
Tunisia	9	55
Turkey	5	72

Critiçal issues in early childhood development

The care and education of children differs from country to country and these differences can be described in many ways. In Table 4, the emphasis is on setting the scene and on spelling out

national policies and constraints to the development of early childhood education in each of the twelve countries. The information is summarized in tabular form and only the key features have been highlighted. While the descriptions are not exhaustive, they do give a first impression of the many accomplishments and challenges that are currently being addressed. Although each country is unique in the ways it looks after its children, a *meta analysis* quickly reveals many commonalities.

Foremost, there is a growing recognition of the rights of the child and of the need to look at the 'whole child', including her/his psycho-social and cultural needs. The importance of childhood, as a precursor to responsible and satisfactory adulthood and as a worthy entitlement in itself is also gaining ground. There is further an increasing awareness of the crucial role of parents and community-based action, and with this, of the limited effectiveness of centrally implemented services.

All twelve countries included in this review are signatories to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and use this as the wider framework for developing their policies. The Action Plan drawn up at the Summit For Children organized by UNICEF in 1991 is also generally acknowledged. Another feature which is common to the Arab countries is the presence of Koranic Schools (*Katateeb*) which teach children the Holy Koran and the principles of Islam. Their tasks are being expanded to include the elements of the three Rs. There is also a trend to support these Katateeb to become more child-friendly.

Most of the challenges also cut across borders. Issues such as generating adequate funding, reaching the poor or socially excluded, involving parents and communities and raising their awareness and demand, developing low-cost and effective services, bridging the gender gap, improving the relation between home and school and between the formal and informal systems, motivating and training teachers and care givers and supporting action research are common to all. In fact, they are virtually universal in nature.

Table 4
Critical Issues in Early Child Development in the Twelve Countries

Country: Algeria	
ECD Framework	The current political turmoil interferes negatively with thinking about child development at policy levels. Pre-school education institutions were legally authorized in 1976 by the Ministry of Labour and Social works. There is no uniform curriculum for the provision of services to pre-school children. The management of each provision determines the programmes for children. The government pays 5/6 of the total expenses of public institutions. Private institutions are not subsidized. Women's groups, supported by international donors, are particularly keen to improve the status of girls.
Constraints	There is a lack of trained Early Child Development Personnel. Koranic schools need to update their services for children. The Government does not have sufficient funds to improve and extend current facilities.

Country: Cyprus	
ECD Framework	There are three types of nursery schools and day care centres: public, private and community-based. The nursery schools are certified and supervised by the Ministry of Education; the day care centres by the Department of Social Welfare and Services. There is a uniform curriculum for the nursery school which, in addition to promoting integrated development, seeks to prepare the child for citizenship. The Pancyprian School for Parents serves as a primary agency for parental education in Cyprus.
Constraints	There is a need for a consistent pre-school education policy. The political situation is fragile and tends to take away attention and resources from Early Child Development. The situation of the children of some 200,000 refugees is particularly vulnerable.

Country: Egypt	
ECD Framework	In 1988 the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood was established. This body formulates policies for children in the fields of social and family care, education, health, and culture and also deals with advocacy. Education is seen as the main strategy for nation building and Early Education is, in that context, given due recognition. The policy entails a move away from seeing kindergartens as 'child keeping' to 'learning and development' institutions. Special attention is given to extending coverage and to reaching out to the rural and urban poor. A range of interventions -public, private, and community-based- is pursued.
Constraints	There is insufficient awareness of the importance of early child development at many levels. The available service lack integration, and little recognition is given to the psycho-social needs of children. The curricula and syllabi need upgrading and enrichment. Existing early child development staff requires additional training and new staff should be recruited. Funds to extend the limited coverage are not available.

Country: Israel	
ECD Framework	The state provides a comprehensive welfare and social security system that provides for a wide range of social and community services. Every municipality and local authority is legally required to maintain a social services department that effects the delivery of social services, including those to children, on a local level. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs determines policy, initiates legislation and enacts regulations for day-to-day social service delivery. In the last few years, however, there has been a move to encourage devolution and decentralization. In addition to promoting learning and social skills, the policy is explicitly geared toward identifying developmental problems at as early an age as possible and treat them. There is a deliberate intention to work with volunteers and community-based groups and to strengthen home-school partnerships.

Constraints	The needs of 'special groups' - new immigrants, minorities, children with learning difficulties and emotional problems, children from non-functioning families - continually pose new challenges.

Country: Jordan	
ECD Framework	The Ministry of Education has formulated minimum standard for nurseries and kindergartens, but in the main responsibility is left to the administrations of the individual institutions. There is a movement to promote public awareness about the significance of early child development, the importance of psycho-social development in addition to health and nutrition, the role of parents. Efforts are being made to improve parent-child interaction, to make early education more responsive to the needs of children. There is a special committee to translate UNICEF's World Summit of Children Declaration and Plan of Action and to develop a national strategy and identify roles and partnerships, and outline financing.
Constraints	Services are mainly concentrated on the major cities. There are insufficient resources to extend coverage to including rural areas. The quality of the services provides needs improving. Poor families are, in the main, under-served as they cannot pay the fees. There are not enough trained professionals to deliver services to these families. The situation of Palestinian refugees poses separate problems.

Country: Lebanon	
ECD Framework	The first priority is to cope with the aftermath of war and to formulate responses to the many children traumatized by violence. Existing policies are remnants of the pre-war era and currently lack coherence. Pre-primary education is optimal; there is a tendency to add pre-primary classes to primary schools.

Constraints	The long years of war and with this the worsening of the socio-economic situation has hampered the formulation of comprehensive policies. Currently there is little available in the areas of exemplary practice, expertise, trained cadre and research to draw on. In addition there is little demand from those mothers and families who stand to gain most from improved services. The situation of Palestinian refugees poses a series of additional problems.

Country: Malta	
ECD Framework	Kindergarten centres, open to children from three years upwards, are provided in every town and village. They are attached to primary schools and fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. In addition to overall development, the centres are seen as appropriate ways to prepare children from remote areas for entry in primary school and to provide relief for working mothers. There is a National Curriculum for the pre-primary school. Tuition is free; so are the mid-day milk and educational materials.
Constraints	A major challenges is to move parental involvement beyond mere membership of parent-teacher organizations and participation in annual events. Another important assignment is to keep child development services innovative and responsive to the needs of parents and children.

Country: Morocco	
ECD Framework	The Government seeks to upgrade the Koranic Schools by training supervisors and teachers and by innovating educational practices. It also seeks to identify new approaches to pre-school education by using local resources creatively. A further policy plank is to upgrade skills of pre-school teachers through national in-residence in-service courses. There is an undertaking to support parents in sending their daughters to school.

Constraints	The low literacy rates, in particular those in women, are experienced as an obstacle in spreading Child Development messages and promoting parent education. The low coverage leaves out large segments of the population, especially those from rural areas. The underdeveloped infra- structure in rural areas is further seen as a considerable hindrance in reaching families. There is a need for educational materials for children and their care givers. The majority of teachers, especially those in Koranic schools, need additional training. The financial resources appear not sufficient to extend coverage and to improve the quality of the services delivered. Teacher salaries, as opposed to student resources, take up a very large share of the available funds.

Country: Palestine	
ECD Framework	The policy making process in this nation is very much in transition. Presently pre-school education is not compulsory in Gaza and in the West Bank. There is a keen interest in providing positive development opportunities for young children and in building up organizational and institutional capacity in this field. The intention is to adapt community-based approaches to alleviating poverty and meeting local needs and to monitor the status of children and women. The Palestine Authority has expressed a willingness to learn from experience available elsewhere and to cooperate with international and local NGOs. Issues related to gender are also given priority.
Constraints	Morale of the professional cadre is low, due to lack of training, support and low salaries. There is a shortage of educational materials, toys and equipment. The physical facilities are generally in a poor state of repair. Parental interest and demand are low, and so is community awareness. There is a severe shortage of financial resources and an over dependence on external donors.

Country: Syrian Arab Republic	
ECD Framework	Various private and governmental bodies run and supervise child development services. In 1991 the Ministry of Education issued a policy on pre-school education. This policy deals with a wide range of matters such as licensing, enrolment conditions, teacher training and supervision, and financing. Current thinking shows a greater interest in providing good care as well as education to the younger age groups. The government target is to reach 20% of eligible children by the year 2000.
Constraints	Financial limitations are mentioned as the major obstacles to expanding and improving services. Lack of transportation, especially in the rural areas poses severe problems. There is a need for good curricula and other educational materials. Buildings are generally in bad condition. Professional educators, teachers and other care givers require training and higher salaries.

Country: Tunisia	
ECD Framework	The public sector is reducing its involvement in the pre-school sector at the service-delivery level, limiting its support to supervision, financing to local authorities and NGOs, and to training. There are government memorandums specifying requirements related to nurseries, kindergarten and Koranic schools. Usually, the Government pays up to 50% of the start up costs of a child development facility. The costs are further shared by municipalities, NGOs, and parents. There is a general move towards making services more child-friendly and involving parents.
Constraints	The tuition fee system limits access to services by poor families. At the same time, the prescribed pricing policies for kindergartens make these rather unattractive commercial propositions. As a result the standard of services is lowered. In the main, there is insufficient expertise and experience in early child development and education to draw on. Existing structures are rather traditional and not open to innovation. The potential of Koranic schools to reach children in rural areas is under- exploited.

Country: Turkey	
ECD Framework	Early childhood education is supervised by the Ministries of Education, Labor and Social Security, Social Services and by the Society for the Protection of Children. By law, workplaces with over 300 workers must offer a day-care service or a creche for the workers' children. The Ministry of Education has prepared a pre-school curriculum. Responding to growing disparities in services for poor and rich families, the government sponsored The Turkish Preschool Project under the leadership of Çigdem Kagitcibasi to inform its policy. The objectives were to develop models for pre-school services, educational materials, and for parent education and teacher training. The prevailing policies place a decreasing emphasis on authoritarian control and increasing emphasis on encouraging independence and open expression of affect. Community initiatives and parental involvement are also encouraged. The overall objective is to raise primary school enrolment to 100%. Areas of intensive industrialization are given priority.
Constraints	Low functional literacy levels, especially in the mothers, prevent children from fully participating in parent education programmes and their children from benefiting from services. The centralized administrative system does not encourage bottom-up initiatives and innovation and the involvement of parents, and communities. Early education services geared at the elite downgrade the value of non-formal, low-cost approaches that are more accessible to poorer families. Financial constraints do not permit extending coverage to the families most at risk.

As stated earlier, the information offered in these tables provides an overview of ECD activities in these countries. Other, more micro level data, also exist and can now be obtained from the various pertinent ministries and NGOs in these countries. The international community can also be tapped for additional information. For the Arab countries, *The Arab Council for Childhood and Development* in Cairo, and *Arab Resource Centre* in Cyprus are prime sources for information. Within the United Nations, UNICEF and UNESCO are very much in the fore front. UNICEF's *Situational Analyses* and related studies are particularly noteworthy. So also is the resource centre run by UNESCO's *Young child and the Family Environment Unit*. The World Bank is increasingly showing interest in early child development and building up a data bank as well. Other major partners in the international community are the Save the Children Federation and Defence for Children International and their national chapters. All these groups, as well as others, can be reached on the Internet through interconnected websites.

6. LEARNING FROM THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

The twelve countries included in this paper display a diversity in their levels of social, economic and political development. They also vary with respect to child development indicators, provisions and programmes for early childhood development and policies for integrating children and families at risk. However, they also share some features in common deriving from their geographical proximity, levels of economic development and shared culture. All twelve countries also have a rich wealth of information in traditional child-rearing practices, as well as experience in developing local responses to ECD needs. There is thus sufficient know-how to allow for experience to be shared within the region and lessons to be learnt. The focus of this section, therefore, will not be on country-specific concerns and recommendations pertaining to local problems. Rather, general principles, areas of mutual concern and emerging trends and issues which are relevant to the region as a whole will be presented.

Demystifying early childhood development

The term early childhood education is often used to describe services for pre-school children in group settings outside the home, be it in a creche, kindergarten, day care centre or nursery. By their very nature such programmes are seldom available universally and are, in principle, open only to those who can access them or afford them. Such an approach only serves to mystify the whole issue of the care and education of young children and acts as an excluding force. In the first instance, it excludes certain sections of the population to whom such provision is not available. These are often the most vulnerable and most at-risk. Secondly, limiting the delivery of child care and education to 'professionals' also has the unpleasant consequence of disempowering parents whose role as the prime educators of their children is devalued.

It is important to remember that not all child care takes place in institutional settings outside the home. From the beginning of time children have been looked after at home by mothers, older relatives or by siblings. Informal arrangements outside the home are also used as a low-cost alternative in many countries. There is nothing intrinsically inferior about the quality of care provided to children in these settings. Research has shown that all children need is 'an average, good environment' to thrive, regardless of the specificities of this environment. This requires that children are safe, get proper health care, are fed and can play and interact regularly with at least one reliable adult. If these conditions are met children will, in the main, develop quite normally.

However, the ability of parents to provide these conditions can be severely restricted due to various factors. Families that risk

exclusion due to factors such as poverty, isolation, psychological distress, discrimination, ill health and poor or non-existent marital bonds may not be in a position to provide a 'normal' environment to their children. Their educational efforts need buffeting and other 'significant adults' may have to help children to make sense of their world.

Developing low-cost large-scale programmes

In the twelve countries reviewed, financial constraints are frequently mentioned as a major reason for the lack of early childhood programmes. There are two opposing perspectives on this matter. The first one stipulates that only **high-quality** education will succeed in helping socially excluded children to integrate well in society. In this context, high quality is defined as using highly-qualified, motivated and well-paid teachers. It also entails the use of scientifically-tested curricula, a rich variety of educational and other stimulation materials as well as good physical structures which are fully appointed to cater to the needs of children, staff and visitors. In other words: high-quality equals a **high-cost** arrangement. The other perspective accepts that in many situations one has to make do with care givers who have hardly received any specialized training, who do not have access to up-to-date information or to a wealth of toys and support materials and who have to work in very provisional settings, and are not well paid. In other words: they work in **low-cost** settings.

The positive outcomes reported by the high-cost approach are usually explained in terms of the applied educational and psychological theories, pedagogical research, and interaction models. The positive results reported by the low-cost approach are described as the outcomes of motivated teachers who bring in local knowledge, work in context, know the children and their families, and use available materials. Further, it has the advantage of being able to reach a larger number of children who would otherwise be excluded from such provision. Both perspectives have their defenders; however, many governments in the region may have no option but to explore the low-cost approach. These have been successfully tried out in the developing world, and there is much that can be learned from their experience.

Replicating successful programmes

There is a growing body of evidence that pleads for strengthening activities in early childhood development that are already in place and building on these. There is, indeed, a global trend in the development world to look closer at 'what works' rather than to invest in finding 'new' solutions. There is a variety of experience in the region as also examples of good practice to make it worthwhile to cooperate and exchange information. However, in order to be truly effective, knowledge should not be

imposed from outside but should be owned and internalized by users. It should also be relevant to local needs and conditions.

The principles underlying successful programmes for children include elements such as empowerment of users, recognition of cultural diversity, local relevance, meeting expressed needs, promotion of holistic development, parental and community involvement and cost effectiveness. However, mechanical cloning of these principles will not automatically lead to successful programmes or to positive benefits for children. In fact understanding the **issues** underlying these principles is crucial to any successful attempt at replication. It will also ensure that programmes and policies are not static but remain responsive to the changing needs of children.

Vertical and horizontal networking

Outcome-oriented networking has been identified as an important tool for replicating and disseminating good practice. Networking has become an indispensable activity for organizations wishing to firm up their financial base, impact policy, expand their outreach, and, most importantly, learn from each other. More significantly, networking creates the conditions for self-generated learning. For networks to function well, there should not be a tightly-structured chain of command or communication. The participants should have the capacity to act and learn without being forced to do so and they should have the potential for voluntary and collective action. As such, networking is, essentially an advocacy tool. Messages can be spread and their veracity and feasibility can best be checked through informal contacts.

But networking also has its drawbacks. Network meetings are not low-cost; they can easily degenerate into talking shops, or turn into elite groups, excluding others and monopolizing the debate. These unproductive dynamics can be avoided by encouraging the participation of horizontally and vertically linked structures connecting public and private organizations, as also the media. In this manner they become *learning organizations*. All too often, networking is restricted to high level officials meeting their international counterparts. This may be done at the expense of vertical networking which brings together policy makers, NGOs, community groups and other grass roots organizations involved with the welfare of children. Setting goal-oriented agendas for networking meetings is another way of ensuring a productive outcome. Sustained, effective and locally rooted dissemination is most likely to take place through outcome-directed networking.

Documentation

Accurate and reliable statistics and documentation on the status of marginalized and at-risk groups would be a first prerequisite to developing appropriate policies to encourage social integration and combat exclusion. While data collection in the

twelve countries under review has improved considerably, it still remains patchy and incomplete. Although very useful, most of it is restricted to facts and figures and descriptions of available services. What seems to be missing are materials that would fill the gaps and validate the many efforts of parents and other care givers. Qualitative descriptions of traditional practices, evaluations of programmes, and ethnographic and anthropological studies are under-represented. Their inclusion would acknowledge individual, cultural and situational differences, local strengths and assets and make centrally managed change more sensitive and sustainable. They would also help to reconcile needs of children and families as perceived by outsiders and as expressed by the parents and children themselves.

Documentation of good practice is also an important tool in helping organizations to exchange and share resources and to learn from each other. Most reviews of successful programmes are mainly descriptive in nature, they seldom go further than offering evidence that the project has a positive effect on children and should, therefore, be supported or emulated. Analytical studies that reveal **why** programmes work, under what **conditions**, and **how** are rare. Without this understanding, the disseminating of projects, or of their elements, could degenerate into a form of blind cloning or become a matter of intuition.

There are some other themes and issues that are generally not mentioned in the reports and policy statements pertaining to the twelve nations, but are clearly apparent in discussions with community leaders, parents and children's advocates. These pertain to domestic violence, sexual and physical abuse of children, trauma and other severe emotional problems in children. There are hardly any data on these matters but they seem sufficiently common, widespread and serious to give cause for concern.

Building on local assets

The dialogue on ECD and social integration in the twelve countries has produced extremely relevant openings for policy and programme intervention. These have been alluded to throughout the text and provide pointers for areas of common concern that can be fruitfully pursued and developed. However, solutions to shared problems will be successful only if they are rooted locally and build on local strengths and assets. It would be fair to say that the most innovative and promising intervention programmes are those which respond to what is happening at the grass roots level, which involve as many key players as possible, including parents, community and other stakeholders, and have strong informal networks. They also to draw on local practices, programmes and activities with children. Not surprisingly, *building on local strengths* is widely accepted as the main principle in human development.

Families that are socially excluded for a variety of reasons may have considerable skills in ECD and may be using informal and

non-formal means for the care and development of their children. Recognition and validation of their efforts would constitute a notable first step in increasing their self-confidence and thus removing an important barrier to social integration.

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